



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

October 17, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

I'm writing to request additional assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as families in Florida try to recover in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma. Specifically, I urge you to provide resources to address the long lines and other problems associated with the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program registration process.

Last month, I wrote to you to urge USDA to approve a Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP) in Florida. While I am grateful that D-SNAP was approved, I am deeply concerned by news reports of how poorly it is being executed by the State of Florida. For example, the Miami Herald reported that 50,000 people came to one assistance center in South Florida—and many were turned away even after waiting in the heat for hours. Earlier today, the Palm Beach Post reported that thousands of people—including families with small children—were forced to wait outside for hours to apply for the program in Delray Beach. Some arrived as early as two o'clock in the morning just to get in line. This is unacceptable.

Given USDA's experience with D-SNAP in other states, I encourage you to provide technical assistance, personnel, and other resources that could help Florida's D-SNAP more effectively reach the individuals and families who need it most. Additionally, if certain requirements, such as the in-person interview, are adding to delays in the approval process, USDA should assist staff at the application centers to expedite interviews so that people can return to work and their families more quickly.

In the weeks since Hurricane Irma struck, Floridians continue to take steps to return to normal life. For a lot of folks, that means going to the grocery store. But for thousands of Floridians who lost food due to flooding or power outages, replacing that food isn't easy: many also lost wages, spent money evacuating, or experienced unexpected costs like fixing a storm-damaged roof. D-SNAP is an important step in the recovery process after a major natural disaster like Hurricane Irma. I appreciate your efforts to ensure that Floridians can access this much-needed assistance as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,